

Filed for intro on 03/26/97

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 142  
By Jackson

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Jerry Thompson upon  
his outstanding career in journalism.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the elected representatives of the state of Tennessee should pay tribute to those exemplary citizens who have given unreservedly of themselves to promote and protect our First Amendment rights; and

WHEREAS, Jerry Thompson, columnist and reporter for *The Tennessean*, is most assuredly one such consummate professional deserving of special recognition; and

WHEREAS, reared on a Robertson County farm, Mr. Thompson still lives on a farm near Springfield, Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Jerry Thompson began his employment with *The Tennessean* as a copy boy making a generous salary of \$1.00 per hour, while still attending Austin Peay State University; and

WHEREAS, leaving school in 1961 to become a full-time reporter with *The Tennessean*, his assignments during the past thirty-four years have included the police beat, court coverage, local and state government, politics, including two presidential campaigns, general assignment reporting, investigative reporting and city editor; and

WHEREAS, Jerry Thompson currently evidences his talent and versatility as a journalist by penning "Thompson Station", a column that appears four days a week in *The Tennessean*; and

**\*96997906\***

96997906

**\*003250\***

\*00325016\*

WHEREAS, he did an abbreviated version of his column for broadcast on WSM Radio in 1986-87; and

WHEREAS, he has also excelled as a producer and on-air personality for *Tennessee Crossroads*, a television magazine show that airs on Nashville's public television station; and

WHEREAS, Jerry Thompson was the first reporter to successfully infiltrate two rival branches of the Ku Klux Klan; posing as a Klansman for more than a year; his findings were first reported in a series of articles in *The Tennessean* in December 1980; and

WHEREAS, following the publication of the series, he made guest appearances on many national and regional television and radio shows; he also testified before a Congressional committee about Klan activities; and

WHEREAS, his sterling investigative series on the Ku Klux Klan won a National Headliner Award and was nominated for the 1981 Pulitzer Prize; and

WHEREAS, he also authored *My Life in the Klan*, which vividly describes his sometimes frustrating and often dangerous experiences during his infiltration of the Klan; and

WHEREAS, in 1983, Mr. Thompson and a team of *Tennessean* reporters won a National Headline Award for "Justice Betrayed: A Sin of Silence", an investigative section that uncovered new evidence in the 1913 trial of Leo Frank, who was convicted of murdering a young girl and who was subsequently abducted by a mob and lynched in Georgia in 1915; and

WHEREAS, in a peerless display of aggressive investigative reporting, Jerry Thompson located an eyewitness who broke his long silence, establishing that Frank's conviction was based on flimsy evidence and stemmed from the anti-Semitic prejudice of the jury; and

WHEREAS, for this superlative journalism, he received the National Conference of Christians and Jews Mass Media Award; and

WHEREAS, based on the evidence uncovered by Jerry Thompson, the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles granted Leo Frank a posthumous pardon seventy years after the fact; and

WHEREAS, in 1991, Jerry Thompson and Robert Sherborne conducted a series of investigative stories on Medicare abuses; later that same year, they testified before Congress about their startling findings; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Thompson has received numerous awards in recognition of his many estimable contributions to journalism, including the American Civil Liberties Union Bill of Rights Award and the prestigious Freedom Forum Free Spirit Award; and

WHEREAS, he also received the first Human Relations Communication Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews; this award has subsequently been named the "Jerry Thompson Communicator Award" in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Jerry Thompson has been honored and roasted by the Nashville-Davidson County Unit of the American Cancer Society, receiving the John C. Tune Award in recognition of his courageous battle against cancer; and

WHEREAS, he is also the author of *Rooster Bingo* and *Other Mostly True Stories*; and

WHEREAS, his many accolades and accomplishments aside, he is most appreciative of the love and companionship he shares with his wife Linda and their five children; and

WHEREAS, these days as he recuperates from his treatments, Jerry Thompson gardens in what he considers the sacred soil of Tennessee and fishes every chance he gets; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we hereby pause to honor and commend Jerry Thompson upon his outstanding career in journalism; applaud his ongoing dedication to preserving First Amendment principles and rights, and salute his steadfast purpose and commitment to leading the examined life with liberality and courage.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation to Mr. Thompson as a token of our esteem, with the final clause omitted from such copy.

